

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

The Virginia State Child Fatality Review Team recently completed a review of all deaths of children age 4 and under who died from unintentional injuries in the Commonwealth in one year (1998). The Team was generally able to trace each death back to one of five categories: motor vehicle accidents, suffocation, drowning, fire, and firearms. The Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention has developed the following tips and safety precautions in the five categories identified by the Team. Tragedy can happen in a few seconds. We want to make sure it doesn't happen to your family.

1. Motor Vehicle Accidents

Over half of the children who died in motor vehicle accidents were not restrained in child safety seats or were improperly restrained. Virginia law requires any person driving a vehicle to make sure that any child less than six years old in the car is properly restrained in an approved child restraint device (booster seat, car seat, infant carrier). All children age 4 through 15 must wear a safety belt, no matter where in the car they are seated.



If you cannot afford to buy a car seat for your baby, contact the Virginia Department of Health Low-Income Safety Seat Distribution Program information line at 1-800-732-8333.

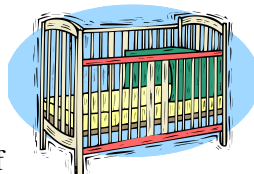
2. Suffocation

Nearly all of the children who suffocated died in unsafe sleeping environments, such as an adult bed, waterbed or day bed. Babies should be provided with their own sleeping space. There are many cases of babies suffocating or strangling in adult sleep settings.

Make sure you have a safe crib for your child. A crib is NOT safe if it has:

- ◆ missing or broken slats.
- ◆ missing or broken crib hardware.
- ◆ slats more than 2 1/3 inches apart. If a soda can fits through the slats, the space is too big.
- ◆ a loose-fitting or very soft mattress. A baby can get caught in a small space between the mattress and the edge of the crib.
- ◆ corner posts over 1/16 inch high or cut-out designs in the headboard or footboard. Babies' clothes can get caught on these and the baby can strangle.

Remove all pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, stuffed toys and other pillow-like soft products from the crib. Consider using a sleeper or other sleep clothing as an alternative to blankets, with no other covering. If



using a blanket, tuck it around the crib mattress, allowing it to reach only as far as the baby's chest. Make sure the baby's head remains uncovered during sleep.

Place your baby on his or her back to sleep. Your child is more likely to be able to breathe if on his or her back and nothing is covering the airway. This is the safest position to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Make sure there are no plastic bags in or around your infant's crib. A child as young as three months old can grab hold of a plastic bag and become entangled in it. Position cribs away from window blind cords, remove drawstrings from children's clothing and don't put strings on pacifiers.

3. Drowning

Infants and young children can drown in as little as two inches of water. A child can drown in less time than it takes to answer the telephone.

Inside your home:

The bathroom is a very dangerous place for your child to be. Make it a habit to close your bathroom door so young children cannot enter when you are not looking. Never leave a baby or toddler alone in the bath or have a young sibling watch a smaller child. Children have drowned in toilets. Keep toilet lids down or, better yet, buy a toilet lock.



A curious toddler can easily drown in a five-gallon bucket with just a small amount of water in it. If you have one of these buckets, supervise children in the area, be sure to empty it completely after use and store it out of reach.

In the yard:

Check your property for containers that might contain standing water such as buckets, pails, flower pots, and garbage cans. Empty the wading pool when you are not

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supervising its use and cover hot tubs when not in use.



Enclose swimming pools on all four sides with a fence at least four feet high. The only entrance to the pool should be through a gate that locks. Consider adding a safety cover and/or door alarms and a pool alarm.

Constantly supervise children when they are near water. At social gatherings, take turns being the "designated adult" to watch the children.

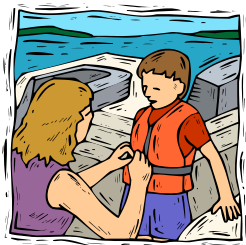
Life vests only work when they are worn! Buy your non-swimming child a life vest that fits and insist that it be worn in and around the pool. Never use inflatable water toys as life preservers or substitutes for supervision. Enforce and model all safety rules including no running on pool decks. Teach your child to wait for permission before getting into the water.

Keep basic life-saving equipment (such as a pole, rope, and throwable flotation device) by the pool and know how to use it. Keep a cell phone nearby when your family is using the swimming pool. Be sure to have 911 programmed into your auto dialer. Every second counts in an emergency.

Learn infant and child CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). This is particularly important for pool owners and people who regularly participate in water recreation.

In and Near the Water:

Insist that life vests — also known as personal flotation devices (PFDs) — be worn when your children are playing near water, on a dock or in a boat, raft, or inner tube. Buy your child his or her own life vest - there may not be one that fits to rent or borrow. Carry it in your car during the summer. Boat cushions are not adequate protection. A life vest must be worn at all times in a boat.



4. Fire/Burns

Although children five and under make up about 9% of the country's population, they account for 19% of the home fire deaths. A quarter of the fires that kill the nation's children are started by children. Supervision is key. Keep lighters and matches out of reach. If a child repeatedly plays with fire or seems to have a morbid fascination with fire, seek professional help at once.



It is crucial to install smoke detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas. Check the batteries once a month to make sure they are working. Fire extinguishers should be mounted in the kitchen, garage, and workshop. Never leave cooking unattended. Careless cooking is the number one cause of residential fires.

Burning candles should never be left unattended nor should they be put in locations where they can be knocked over by children or pets. Some families have religious reasons for burning candles for an extended period of time. If you must do so, consider putting your candle in a pan of water. The pan should be large enough that if the candle falls over, it will extinguish itself.

Young children can also be burned from tap water that is too hot. Set your water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to help prevent burns from hot water. Be sure to check the temperature of bath water before placing your child in it.

5. Firearms

A child as young as three years old is capable of firing a gun. Do not leave firearms where children can access them. They should be stored (unloaded) in a locked cabinet or gun safe. All ammunition should be locked up in a location separate from firearms.



Teach your children that guns are dangerous. If they see one, they should:

- Stop!
- Don't touch.
- Leave the area.
- Tell an adult.

Remember that there is a gun in one of two American households. If your child is going to play at a friend's house, ask the friend's parent if there is a firearm in the home. Before leaving your child at a babysitter's home, ask if there is a firearm in the house and discuss what safety measures have been taken to prevent access.

Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention
c/o Prevent Child Abuse Virginia
1-800-CHILDREN

